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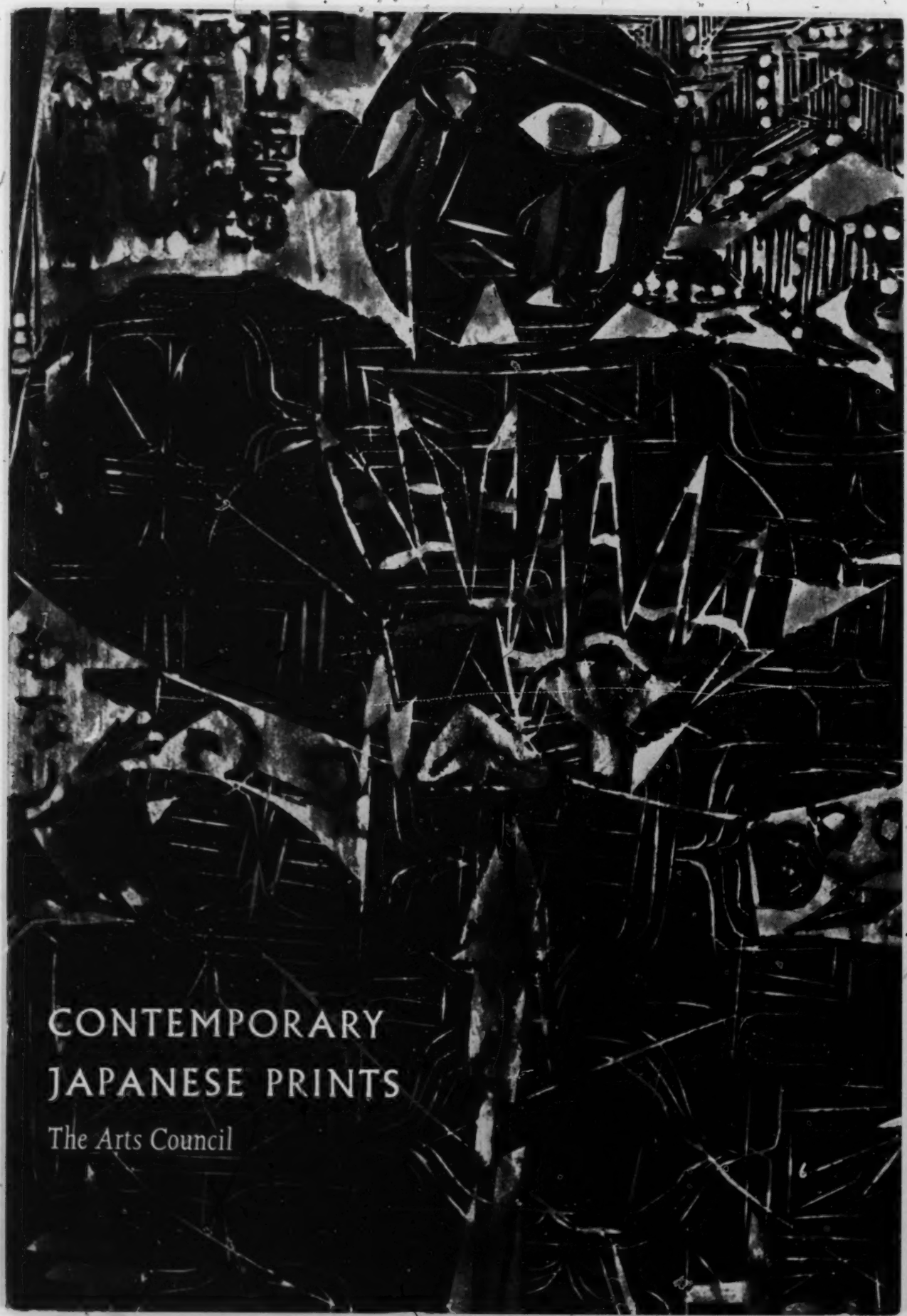


CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE PRINTS

The Arts Council

Cover Munakata Shiko MT SHIRANE Cat. No.23

Foreword

This, the first exhibition of contemporary Japanese prints to be organized by the Arts Council, was inspired by the large and comprehensive exhibition on the same theme arranged by the Art Institute of Chicago in 1960. Mr and Mrs Basil Gray kindly undertook the selection of these prints during a visit to Tokyo, and we are grateful for their assistance. We are indebted to Mr Takahashi, of the Yoseido Gallery, for the loan of the exhibits, to Mr Kei Miyakawa First Secretary at the Japanese Embassy for his assistance, and to Mr Peter Swann, Keeper of the Department of Eastern Art at the Asnmolean Museum, who has written the introduction to the catalogue.

G.W.

Introduction

These prints will probably come as an exciting surprise to the British public. Until only a few years ago we might have been justified in thinking that the great print movement was as dead as the world it so brilliantly portrayed. Hokusai and Hiroshige died in the middle of the last century. We have just celebrated the centenary of the death of Kuniyoshi, the last of the great triumvirate of late masters. After them a few artists produced the occasional print of quality but generally speaking the print movement petered out and somewhat ingloriously at that.

The opening of Japan to the West from 1868 onwards let in a flood of Western art. Many Japanese artists, like their technicians, spent their energies in absorbing Western modes, particularly oil painting. Some, in a vain effort to stem the tide and preserve their own civilization, reacted violently against the West. The results of both impulses were equally uninspired. Meanwhile, as is well known, examples of the Japanese print, the popular art of the masses, reached Europe where they dazzled Western artists of the late 19th century. Impressionists saw in them ready-made solutions to their problems of line and colour. While the prints created a furor in Europe, in Japan they were ignored as a vulgar, popular art unworthy of serious consideration. The Western student in Japan at the beginning of the century would never be shown a single print. Only Western enthusiasm made the Japanese conscious of the achievements of this branch of their own art.

During the last fifty years a few Japanese artists stemming from the traditional schools have worked in Paris where they often intrigued a jaded taste by their seeming simplicity, sensitivity and evocative use of Eastern mediums. But they never achieved the fruitful synthesis of East and West for which we have always hoped. Now, modern styles of art, owing so much to Japanese prints, have found their proper Japanese vehicle, one in which the Japanese artist can feel completely confident and independent. This confidence and independence are important to the Japanese psychology. For Japan is a fully Westernised country in the main stream of international art movements; her art must stand or fall by the standards of Paris, New York and London – not by those of her ancient art and even less by what we think it should devote itself to. The woodcut technique is the perfect vehicle for a synthesis of East and West and this exhibition shows that it can be achieved with brilliance.

The artists in this exhibition are conscious of and responsive to international styles but they have returned to ancient techniques of which they are complete masters. Critics, nourished in the 'Japanese imitation' myth will look for Western influences. They may indeed find some, but is the Japanese designer any more indebted to the West than is one Western artist to another? Often there is no debt whatsoever. A remarkably large majority have a freshness, originality and a sensitivity which are completely convincing.

We all have learned to acknowledge our debt to Japanese architecture, a debt which I predict will increase. In the field of art also the Japanese have much to offer the West. Hashimoto Okiie, for example, interprets Eastern themes in a powerful Western manner which at the same time owes nothing to individual Western masters. Saito Kiyoshi produces textures unknown to us. The medium by which Kitaoka Fumio produces brilliant pictorial effects is black and white only, the traditional method of the East. One sees also the conservative stream in artists who seem to be trying to carry on where the old print movement left off. The diversity is that of a vital art movement. In its variety and energy the modern print movement shows the same high level of excitement as the great periods of the classical print when an eager public impatiently awaited the latest products of the great masters. Japan supports its artists and craftsmen more generously than do Western nations. The future is extremely promising.

The dates of the artists represented here show that this is not simply a post-war phenomenon of a group of young men. The roots of the modern movement go back half a century. Munkata Shiko, the most famous living designer, was born in 1903. Onchi Kōshirō, the founder of the movement (not represented here), was born in 1891 and died only seven years ago. Hiratsuka Unichi, the teacher and leader of the movement, was born in 1895 and is still working. The work of twelve artists is on show. The number could easily be trebled among only the best known.

Those accustomed to classical prints will be surprised by the size of some of these works. The modern wood-cut artist has often abandoned the cherry-wood block since it restricts his sizes. He will sometimes use large sheets of plywood if necessary. As in the West a lively experimental approach is one of his main stimulants. Unlike earlier times, he is no longer just the designer who left the actual production to other craftsmen, however skilled. The modern artists will perform all the stages of production himself, trying new methods and tools to achieve ever more subtle effects. In this he is in sympathy with the

flourishing craft movement which dazzles the sensitive visitor to Japan. The print thus stays close to the artist until its finished state and its technique is a very individual matter.

The materials themselves are also important. In Japan paper-making is an art and some of the most subtle effects owe much to the fine *torinoko* and *kozo* papers which take the ink and colours in their own way.

Great Britain has lagged far behind the United States in the appreciation of recent Japanese artistic developments. The United States has seen many exhibitions of these prints; individuals and museums have made collections of them. Here, only the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford has a representative collection. It is fitting also that we acknowledge our debt to the enthusiasm of Oliver Statler who in his *Modern Japanese Prints: An Art Reborn* has recorded the post-war flowering of the movement. James A. Michener has also championed them in his infectiously enthusiastic writings on the Japanese print.

I venture to predict that this collection, chosen by Basil and Nicolete Gray, will provide a stimulating introduction and be only the forerunner of many such exhibitions. Here lies an opportunity which we should seize.

PETER C. SWANN

CATALOGUE

Note The Japanese word *hanga* denotes a picture made with a block. All the prints in this exhibition are woodcuts. Measurements which are block size, are given in inches, height before width. The number of prints in each edition is given following the measurements.

The notes on the artists are taken from *Modern Japanese Prints: An Art Reborn*, by Oliver Statler (Tokyo, 1956).

A number of the prints are for sale, prices on application. Enquiries should be made to the St George's Gallery Prints, 7 Cork Street, W1.

HIRATSUKA Unichi

Born 1895 in Matsue. First experience of carving in imitating Japanese seals carved with Chinese characters. First influences were Western from magazines reproducing post-impressionists. Enrolled at 21 in art school of Saburosuke Okada in Tokyo where he was also taught Western-style painting by Hakutei Ishii who encouraged him to study print making. Studied traditional *ukiyoe* carving technique with Bonkotsu Igami. Came under the influence of Japanese art in working on the editorial staff of art magazines. Has worked at wood-cut art since 1916 and works best in black and white. Has tried brush painting but always comes back to block printing as a more vigorous and powerful medium. Interest in Buddhist prints of the Heian era. Collects ancient tiles and takes rubbings of them. 'Western art gave me my technique but Japanese art gave me my approach.'

1 MOON OF THE FIFTEENTH NIGHT 1957
$33\frac{3}{8} \times 30\frac{5}{8}$
Lent by the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

HASHIMOTO Okiie

Born 1899. Took teachers' training course at the government art school at Ueno. Throughout his teaching career has specialized in the Western media of oils, watercolour and pastel. Has made prints since attending in 1932 a short course given by Hiratsuka. Makes a series of sketches which he transfers to the block and is specially noted for his many prints of old Japanese castles.

HASHIMOTO continued

2 STONE GARDEN, NO. 12 1960
$21\frac{1}{2} \times 16\frac{3}{4}$: 50

3 STONE GARDEN (RYUAN-JI) 1959 *Plate 2*
$16\frac{3}{4} \times 21\frac{1}{2}$: 60

4 OTEMON 1956
$15\frac{1}{2} \times 21\frac{1}{2}$: 30

5 BAMBOO GARDEN 1959
$24 \times 19\frac{1}{2}$: 50

6 SAND GARDEN (KONCHI-IN) 1959
$24 \times 19\frac{1}{2}$: 50

7 STEPPING STONE (B) 1960
$24 \times 19\frac{1}{2}$: 50

8 SHADOW (SEIREN-IN) 1956
$24 \times 19\frac{1}{2}$: 50

9 LANDSCAPE (NAGATORO)
$19\frac{1}{2} \times 24$: 30

10 GIRL AND IRIS 1952
$15\frac{1}{4} \times 21$

AZECHI Umetarō

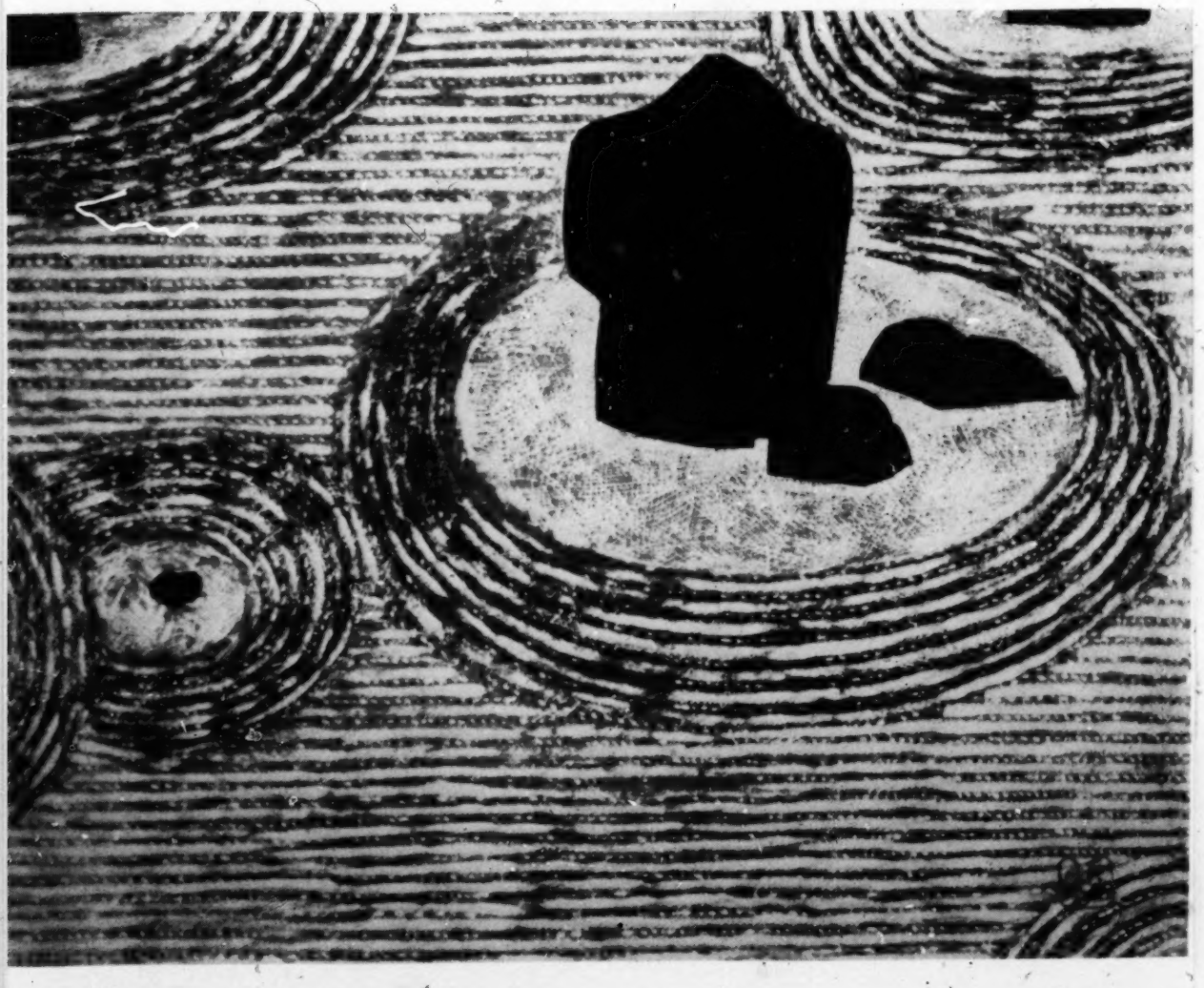
Born 1902 on the island of Shikoku. Took art correspondence course before coming to Tokyo at age of 19 and earning a living delivering newspapers. Had not enough money to attend an art school and worked for two years as a sign painter in his native Shikoku. Obtained job in government printing office where he made experimental prints from lead plates. Encouraged in print-making by Hiratsuka, and showed in annual *Hanga* Association exhibition and later in Kokuga-Kai. Has said that his own lack of training saves him from Japanese eclectic facility and names Onchi as the greatest influence on his style.

11 HARD FIGHT 1950
$27 \times 18\frac{1}{4}$: 50

12 FROZEN EARTH 1960 *Plate 7*
27×18 : 50

Plate 1 Kitaoka Fumio
DRIFTWOOD AND CLOUD Cat. No. 53

Plate 2 Hashimoto Okiie
STONE GARDEN Cat. No. 3



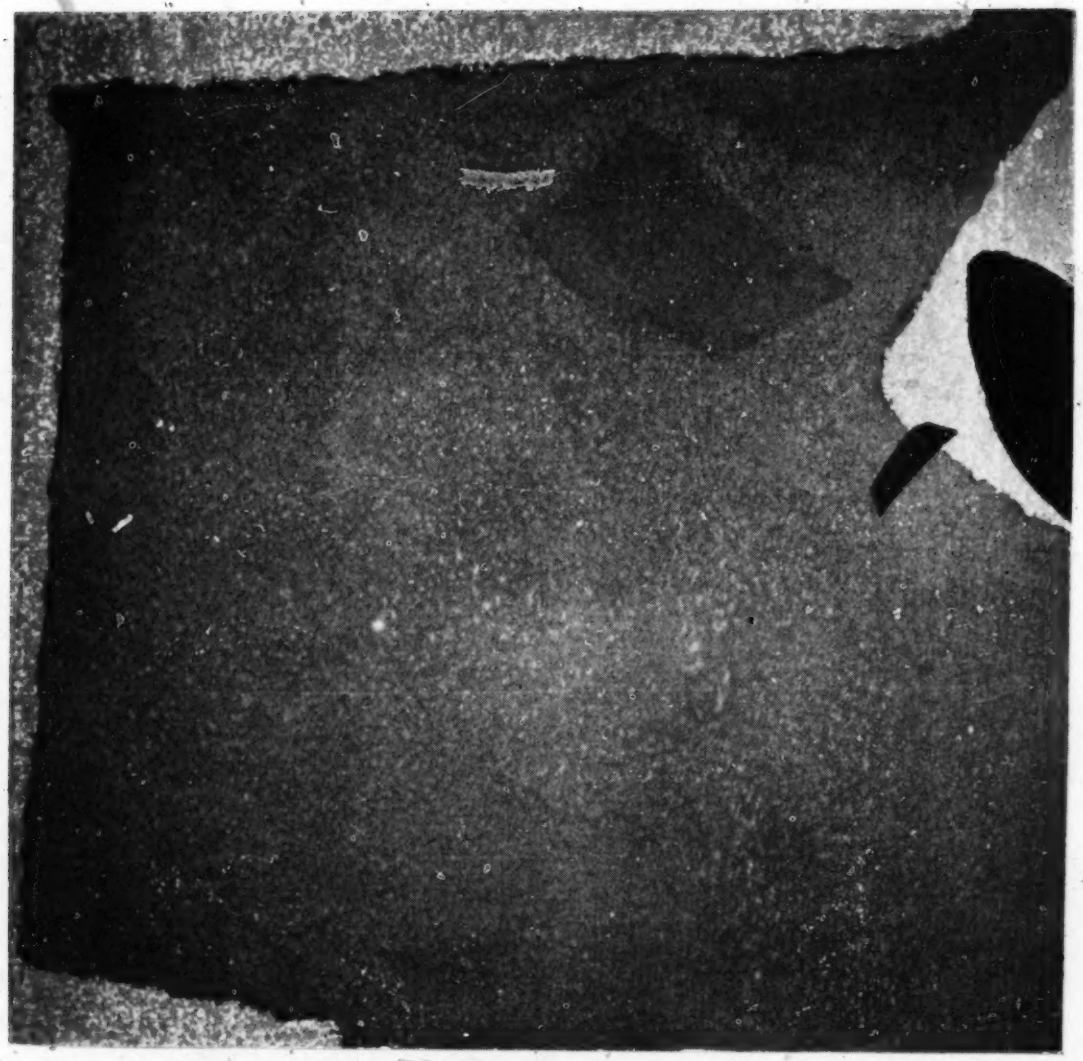


Plate 3 Yoshida Masaji
SPACE, NO. 7 Cat. No. 49

Plate 4 Yoshida Hodaka
THE CONFUSION SEASON Cat. No. 61

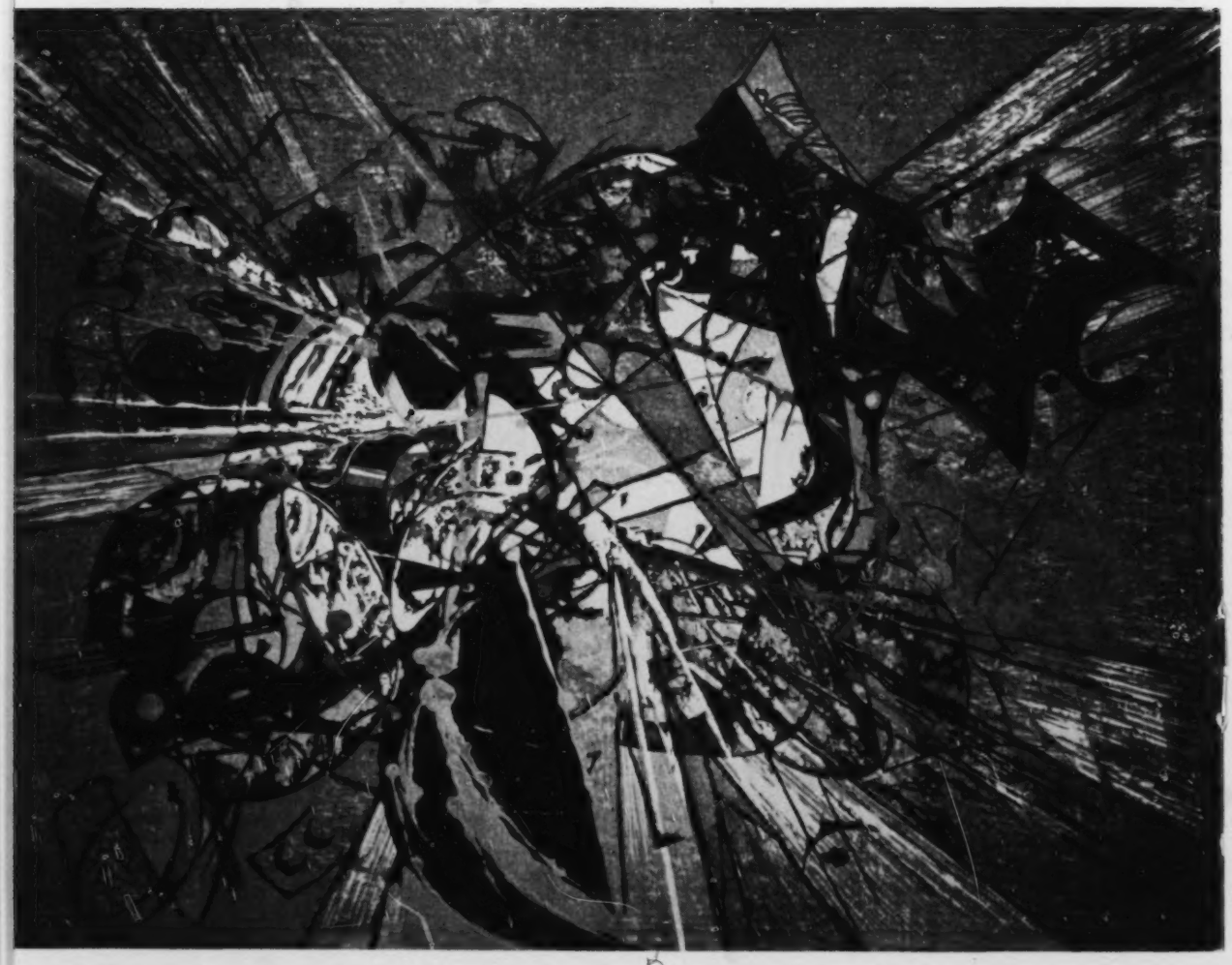
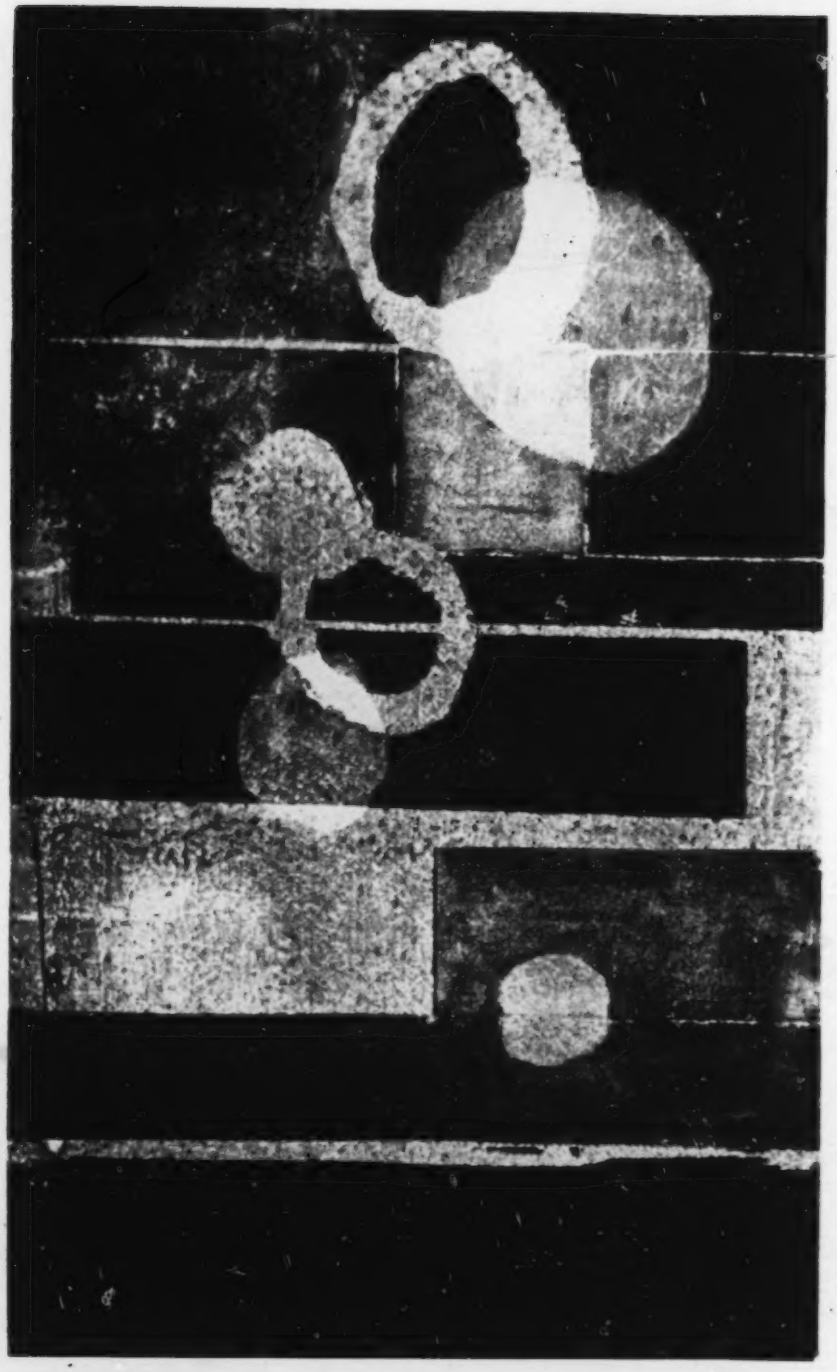


Plate 5 Iwami Reika
WORK 60–10 Cat. No. 62

Plate 6 Hagiwara Hideo
A TRADITION Cat. No. 47



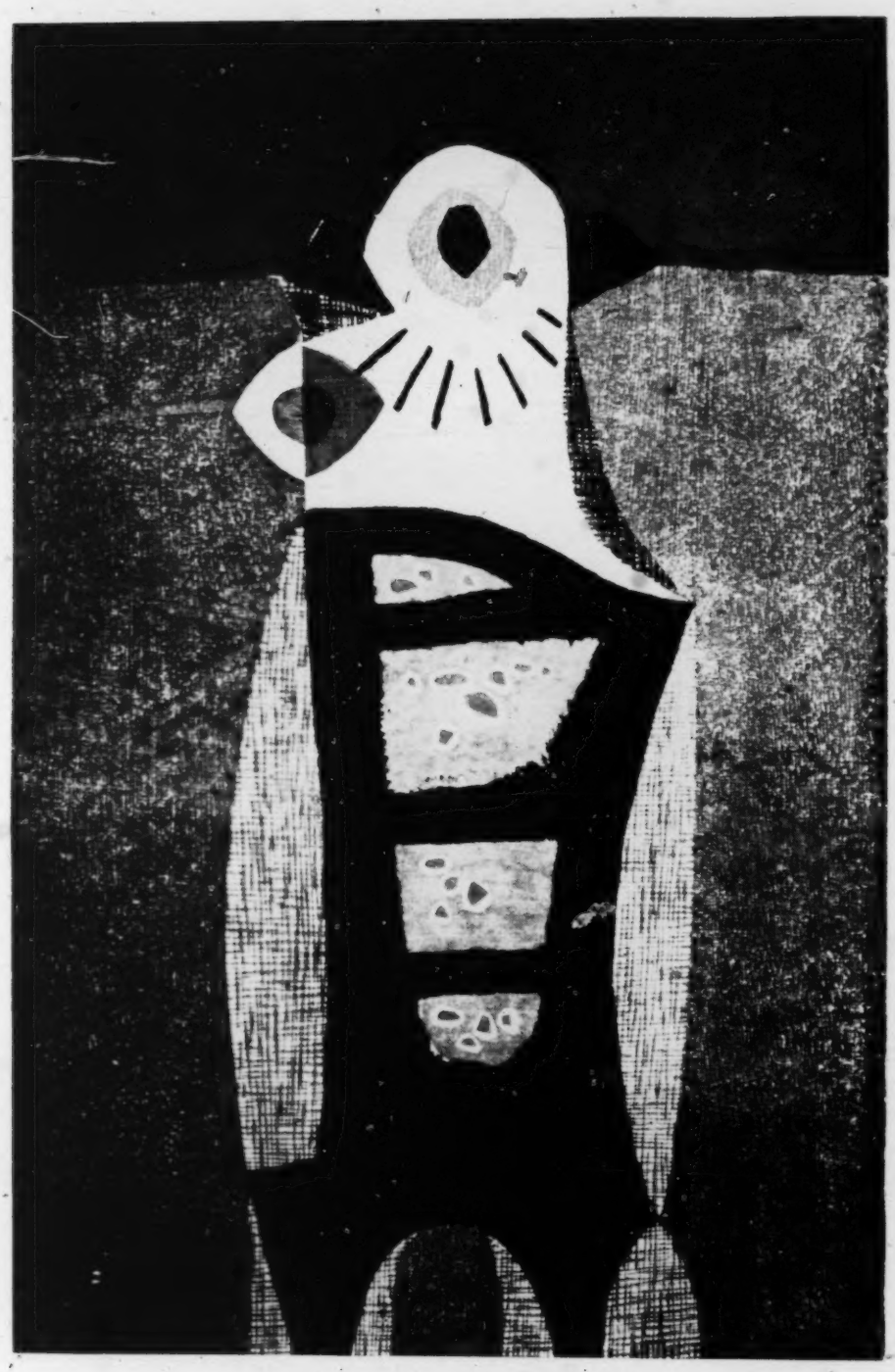
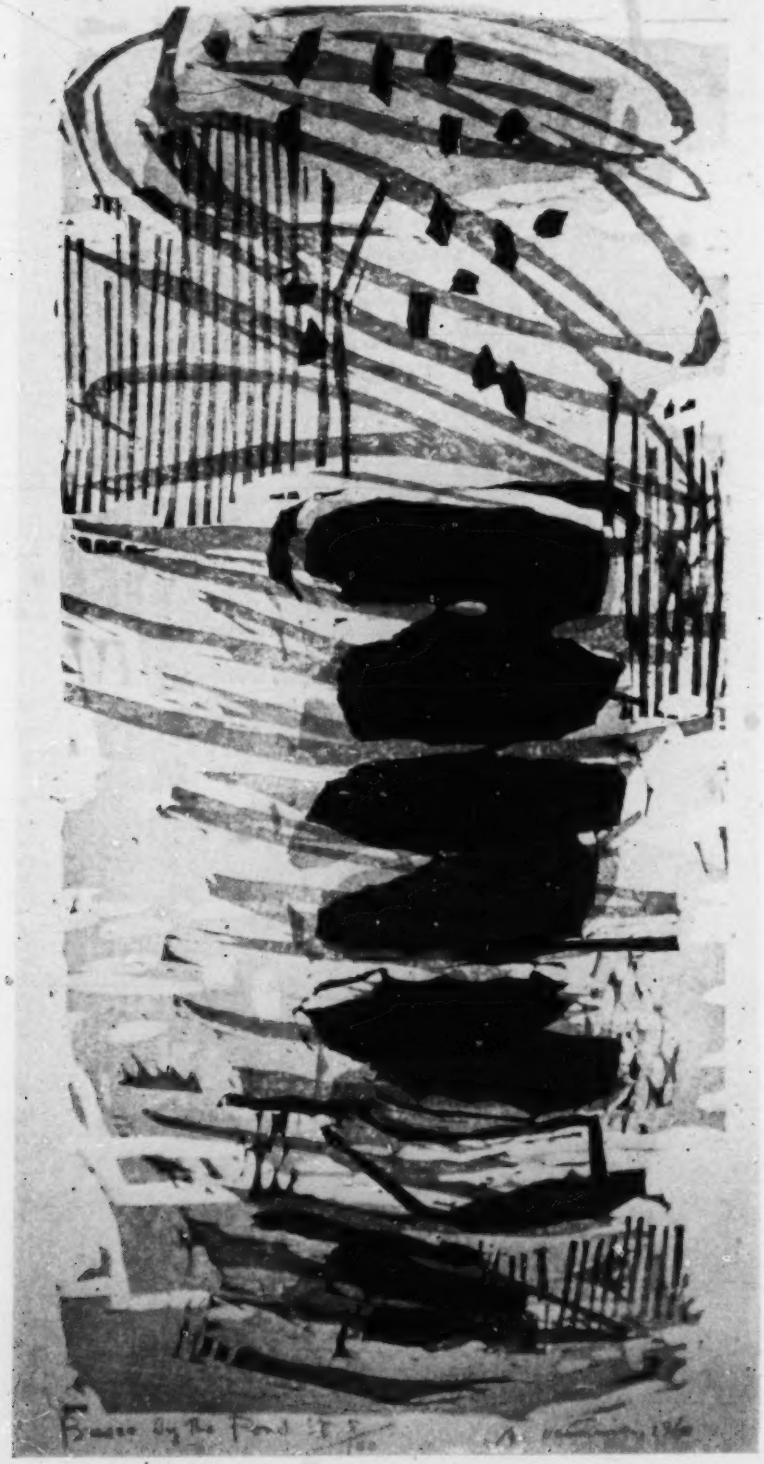


Plate 7 Azechi Umetarō
FROZEN EARTH Cat. No. 12

Plate 8 Uchima Ansei

REFRESHING Cat. No. 56



AZECHI continued

13 WATCHFUL EYE 1957
$21\frac{3}{4} \times 14$: 70

14 IN THE SNOW STORM 1959
27×18 : 50

15 SNOW STORM 1960
27×18 : 50

16 FRIENDSHIP AT THE MOUNTAIN 1957
$22\frac{1}{4} \times 14\frac{1}{4}$: 70

17 BLUE ICE 1960
27×18 : 50

MUNAKATA Shiko

Born 1903. Work based on Zen Buddhism and dominated by religious themes. After first trying his hand at oil painting Munakata rejected all foreign Western influences and said, 'For European artists, oil is their heritage, but it wasn't mine. I wanted the universe at the tip of my brush and I realized it never could be while I worked in a borrowed medium. I looked back to my own country, back to Japan, and I saw that the medium in my heritage was the wood-block print.' Won the 1st prize for *hanga* at 1955 Saõ Paolo Biennale.

18 THE OTHER SHORE (HIGAN)
$18 \times 12\frac{1}{2}$

19 SNOW BURIAL (SETSUIN)
$18 \times 18\frac{1}{4}$

20 RAHULA (RAGORA)
$37\frac{1}{4} \times 42$

21 KATYAYANA (KASENEN)
$37\frac{1}{4} \times 12$

22 SINKING (BOTSUZEN)
Shown in London only.
$49\frac{1}{2} \times 36\frac{1}{2}$ (Kakemono)

23 MT SHIRANE Repr. on cover
16×12

MUNAKATA continued

24 PRINTS OF A WANDERER (RYURIHANGA SAKU)
Shown in London only.
72 × 36 screen size. (Twelve prints on a two-fold screen)

25 FOUR PRINTS OF SONGS, 1956
Shown in London only.
32½ × 30 (Kakemono)
Lent by the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

YAMAGUCHI Gen

Born 1903 in Shizuoka and lives in fishing village of Enoura on the Izu peninsula. Has been a Christian since his youth. Interest in art developed through writings of Saneatsu Mushakoji one of the leaders of the Shirakaba movement which founded a writers' and artists' village. Joined the Itto-en movement, a brotherhood of ascetics dedicated to voluntary work for the community. Worked at Onchi's home and submitted a first print to the *Hanga* Association exhibition. Devoted himself to studying art, interrupted by full-time engagement in anti-militarist activities. Subsequently renewed his association with Onchi and, like him, has made prints using leaves and other natural materials.

26 RETRIBUTION
23½ × 17 : 30

27 PASSIVE
23½ × 17 : 50

28 THE WAY FOR HEAVEN 1958
23½ × 17 : 50

29 GERMINATION 1959
33 × 17¾ : 50

SAITO Kiyoshi

Born 1907, a native of Aizu. Went to Tokyo at the age of 25 and is self-taught. Rejects traditional *ukiyoe* and strongest influences on his style have been those of Munch, Redon and Gauguin. Won prize for *hanga* at first Saõ Paulo Biennale in 1951. Has experimented widely

with different woods, tools and techniques in the making of prints, including making colour prints from one block. Considers himself basically an oil painter.

30 MOSS GARDEN SAIHO-JI (KYOTO) 1957
24 × 18 : 80

31 HANIWA (J) 1952
30 × 17 : 30

32 SHOJI (SANPO-IN) 1960
20 × 12 : 152

33 WALL OF KYOTO 1960
19 × 31 : 100

34 MAIKO KYOTO (C) 1960
17 × 30 : 100

35 HOKKAIDO (A) 1961
$15\frac{1}{4} \times 20\frac{3}{4}$: 150

36 TOSHODAI-JI (NARA) (D) 1959
24 × 18 : 80

37 TEMPLE 1959
30 × 16 : 100

HAGIWARA Hideo

Born 1913 in Kofu, Yamanashi. Graduated in 1938 from Oil Painting Department of Tokyo Art School. Has given up oil painting for print-making and has exhibited widely in Japan and abroad. Won a prize at the 2nd International Biennial Exhibition of Prints in Tokyo.

38 COMPOSITION (L) 1958
$15 \times 20\frac{3}{4}$: 30

39 NO TITLE 1959
$13\frac{1}{2} \times 18\frac{1}{2}$: 10

40 FORM 1959
$13\frac{1}{2} \times 24\frac{1}{4}$: 30

41 SOIL (4) 1960
$16\frac{3}{4} \times 22$: 30

HAGIWARA continued

42 SOIL (13) 1960
16¾ × 22 : 30

43 DEAD LEAVES 1960
24¾ × 16¼ : 30

44 BUILDING ON THE SAND 1960
16¾ × 22 : 30

45 STONE AND SAND 1959
12 × 16½ : 30

46 COMPOSITION (Q) 1958
25½ × 17¼ : 30

47 A TRADITION 1959 *Plate 6*
28¾ × 17½ : 30

YOSHIDA Masaji

Born 1917 in Wakayama, and unrelated to the family of Yoshida Hodaka. Spent a year at a private art school in Tokyo before entering the art school at Ueno and studying print-making with Hiratsuka. Called up in 1942 on graduating from Ueno and served in China. Returned to Ueno for a post-graduate year in 1946 and then became a teacher. He turned from oil painting to print-making because oil colours were difficult to obtain and because he felt print-making was a more suitable technique in which to develop his abstract two-dimensional ideas. Acknowledges the supreme influence of Onchi. Formerly made small blocks printed in tones of grey, for which he devised a new technique to ensure perfect registration. Has lately made large black and white prints, and has experimented in etching and with the use of stencils.

48 PROFUNDITY, NO. 1 1959
16¼ × 10¼ : 30

49 SPACE, NO. 7 1960 *Plate 3*
17½ × 17¼ : 20

50 MOSS, NO. 4 1958
17 × 11¼ : 50

KITAOKA Fumio

Born 1918 in Tokyo. Studied for a year at a private art school before entering the government art school at Ueno where he took Hiratsuka's course in print-making. Graduated in 1942. Worked at East Asia Cultural Development Society in Manchuria, returning to Japan after the war. While in Manchuria he saw Chinese realistic prints which he helped to introduce into Japan. Studied wood engraving at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris 1955–56.

51 DRIFTWOOD AT THE SEASHORE
$21\frac{1}{2} \times 14\frac{1}{4}$: 30

52 HUT OF THE SEASHORE 1958
$21\frac{1}{2} \times 14\frac{1}{4}$: 30

53 DRIFTWOOD AND CLOUD 1960 Plate 1
$33 \times 21\frac{3}{4}$: 30

UCHIMA Ansei

Born 1921 in California, and lives at present in the United States. Active in Japan after the war and is a member of the *Hanga* Association. Won the Shell Art Prize in 1956 and has frequently exhibited in international print exhibitions.

54 KATSU 1960
$12\frac{1}{2} \times 17$: 21

55 WINTER 1959
$16 \times 14\frac{1}{4}$: 50

56 REFRESHING (RYO) 1960 Plate 8
$20\frac{1}{2} \times 11\frac{1}{2}$: 100

57 THE TIME OF JOY 1960
14×19 : 22

YOSHIDA Hodaka

Born 1926, son and grandson of print-makers. Trained as a scientist but turned to painting in an abstract style. Started to make prints in 1950, always carving and printing his own blocks. He has

YOSHIDA continued

experimented with mixed techniques of woodblock and dry point. Travelled widely in America, Europe and Asia 1955–58.

58 MASK, A 1956
21 × 15

59 TABLE FOR OFFERING 1956
15 × 21

60 PLAYING GOD 1960
21 × 15 : 30

61 THE CONFUSION SEASON 1959 *Plate 4*
22 × 16¾ : 50

IWAMI Reika

Born 1927 in Tokyo. Studied at Bunka Gakuin University, graduating in 1955. Member of *Hanga* Association and Kokuga-Kai, and won prizes in the latter society in 1957 and 1959. Exhibited widely in Japan and overseas. Won a prize at the Contemporary Japanese Print Contest in 1960.

62 WORK 60–10 1960 *Plate 5*
26¾ × 19¾ : 2

63 DETACHMENT 1959
21½ × 14 : 5

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